Answer given by Mrs Wallström on behalf of the Commission

(27 November 2002)

The Commission very recently received two complaints concerning the project the Honourable Member is referring to for a wide route between Bordeaux et Toulouse to carry parts for the Airbus A 380. It is currently examining whether the project is in any way incompatible with Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds and Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora. Having examined the information contained in the complaint files, the Commission will take the necessary steps to ensure that Community environment law is observed.

The Commission can inform the Honourable Member that no Community financing is involved in this project.

(2003/C 222 E/052) WRITTEN QUESTION E-3138/02 by Mihail Papayannakis (GUE/NGL) to the Commission

(4 November 2002)

Subject: Implementation of the Community initiative Leader+ in Greece

The newspaper Kathimerini reports that the Kozani development company, which was responsible for the Greek network of the Community's Leader initiative in the previous planning period, sent a letter to the development companies implementing the Leader+ programme for 2000-2006, requesting them to incorporate measures for the benefit of hunting associations in their programmes.

The aims of this proposal are:

- the development of the wildlife’ of selected areas of the country,
- measures to be implemented in areas where hunting is not prohibited,
- the drawing up of integrated management plans for the forest areas concerned,
- special breeding areas for game and a register of animals caught drawn up by the hunting associations(!),
- training groups to develop skills, the aim being to inform hunters on matters relating to ecology, biology of species, ecosystem management, use of guns etc.

The proposal was put forward by the Greek Hunting Confederation and signed by its president, who is also the Director-General of the management authority for the 3rd Community Support Framework in Greece. EUR 175 000 are required to draw up the management plans and EUR 200 000 for training for each local Leader+ programme.

This top-down 'sponsorship' is contrary to the compulsory bottom-up approach required in drawing up local programmes (Commission communication on Leader+, April 2000). At the same time, hunters are given the right to draw up management plans for forests for which they have no competence, while the Ministry for Agriculture has itself announced 24 management plans for forests which are to be financed from the operational programme 'Agricultural Development' for 2000-2006.

Can the Commission say what practical measures it proposes to take to ensure that the Leader+ programme is implemented without hindrance or unlawful intervention? What does the Commission intend to do to prevent the EU financing the same measures twice (forest management plans, seminars, etc.) from the same structural fund and the Leader+ programme from funding incompetent bodies (the Hunting Confederation and hunting associations)?
Supplementary answer
given by Mr Fischler on behalf of the Commission

(30 January 2003)

According to the information supplied by the Greek authorities, the territorial plans of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) already contained at the time of their evaluation by the Leader+ managing authority a number of wildlife protection and development activities outside protected areas, such as planting hedges, small-scale sowing, introducing systems for monitoring the population of wildlife species, information and awareness activities, etc. The activities will be the subject of a management plan approved by the forestry departments responsible at the appropriate geographical level. The plans are highly specific and there is no risk of overlap with the forestry management studies provided for in other programmes, such as the operational programme for rural development.

The proposed activities will be evaluated and selected in accordance with the procedures and selection criteria of the instruments agreed under the Leader+ programme. All the activities, only some of which could interest hunters, would cost an estimated EUR 3.5 million for the whole programme, i.e. around 1% of part 1 of the national programme. This is only a guide figure, of course.

The Commission would comment as follows regarding the Honourable Member’s concerns:

- Since the activities described above formed part of the LAGs’ territorial plans approved by the managing authority, there are no grounds for maintaining that the bottom-up approach was not followed.

- By the same token, since the wildlife management plans will be confirmed by the relevant public authority, the Commission would not be able to oppose them because they are a matter for the Member State in accordance with the subsidiarity principle. The application of the selection criteria of the instruments should be sufficient to allay this concern.

However, the Commission is sceptical about four aspects:

- The Greek authorities state that the activities will be undertaken outside protected areas. The definition of special protection areas under Article 4(1) and (2) of Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds (1) continues to be the subject of controversy and on 19 December 2002 the Commission sent Greece a reasoned opinion for failure to implement the Directive properly. Before limiting the activities in question to areas outside protected areas, the definition of the latter needs to be agreed. The Commission considers that Greece has classified as special protection areas (SPAs) areas whose number and size are clearly below the number and size which should be classified as special protection areas according to the Directive.

- The Commission would also point out that the Greek legislation on the 2002-2003 hunting season is likewise questionable with regard to Article 7 of Directive 79/409/EEC. The Commission has decided to refer this matter to the Court of Justice.

- Training and awareness activities under the Leader+ programme must be reserved at the outset for local people from the areas selected under the programme and for direct recipients of aid under the programme who live in those areas and undertake their activities there. Leader+ does not seem suitable for financing training and awareness activities undertaken by people who are only visiting Leader areas.

- Some of the proposed activities for wildlife (e.g. planting hedgerows and sowing) could have implications for agri-environmental measures under Chapter VI of Regulation (EC) No 1257/1999 (2) within areas which the Commission considers should be protected (see first point above). This question therefore needs to be clarified with the Member State.
The Commission will send the above comments to the relevant authorities in the Member State, to draw their attention to them and to arrive at a solution which is in accordance with Community legislation and consistent with current programming.


WRITTEN QUESTION E-3147/02
by Roberta Angelilli (UEN) to the Commission
(4 November 2002)

Subject: Use of EU funding by metropolitan areas

In many European cities the problems of social cohesion and sustainable development are among the most pressing: damage to the environment is being matched by a deterioration in the quality of life of city-dwellers. For this reason, in recent years the European Union has launched a wide range of measures designed to improve our cities and the quality of life of their inhabitants.

However, on a number of occasions the Commission has emphasised that not enough use is being made of European funding by local authorities, even though such resources are clearly needed to deal with extensive social, economic and environmental problems.

In the light of the above, can the Commission state whether:

1. A comprehensive study of metropolitan areas has been carried out?
2. An action plan has been drawn up for each metropolitan area, in particular European capitals?
3. A comparison has been drawn up of the extent to which European capitals use the funding available?

Answer given by Mr Barnier on behalf of the Commission
(11 December 2002)

The Commission, in cooperation with Eurostat, has for some years been using a set of indicators called the Urban Audit to assess the quality of life in European cities. The findings of the first phase — Urban Audit I, based on a sample of 58 cities — were published in May 2000. Urban Audit II, which will cover approximately 170 European cities including all capital cities, is in the course of being launched and the findings should be available by early 2004.

Under the Interreg III Community Initiative, the Commission is part-financing a programme called the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON).

Applying the principles of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), the programme recently launched inter alia the following three studies:

− urban areas' role, situation and potential as nodes of polycentric development;
− town-countryside relations in Europe;
− the Structural Funds' territorial impact on urban areas.

These studies, whose initial findings are expected by mid-2003, will examine the territorial disparities which exist in a number of urban and metropolitan areas.

As regards the possibility of an action plan drawn up at Community level for each capital, the Commission does not envisage any such initiative because responsibility for this rests with the Member States' authorities in accordance with the subsidiarity principle.